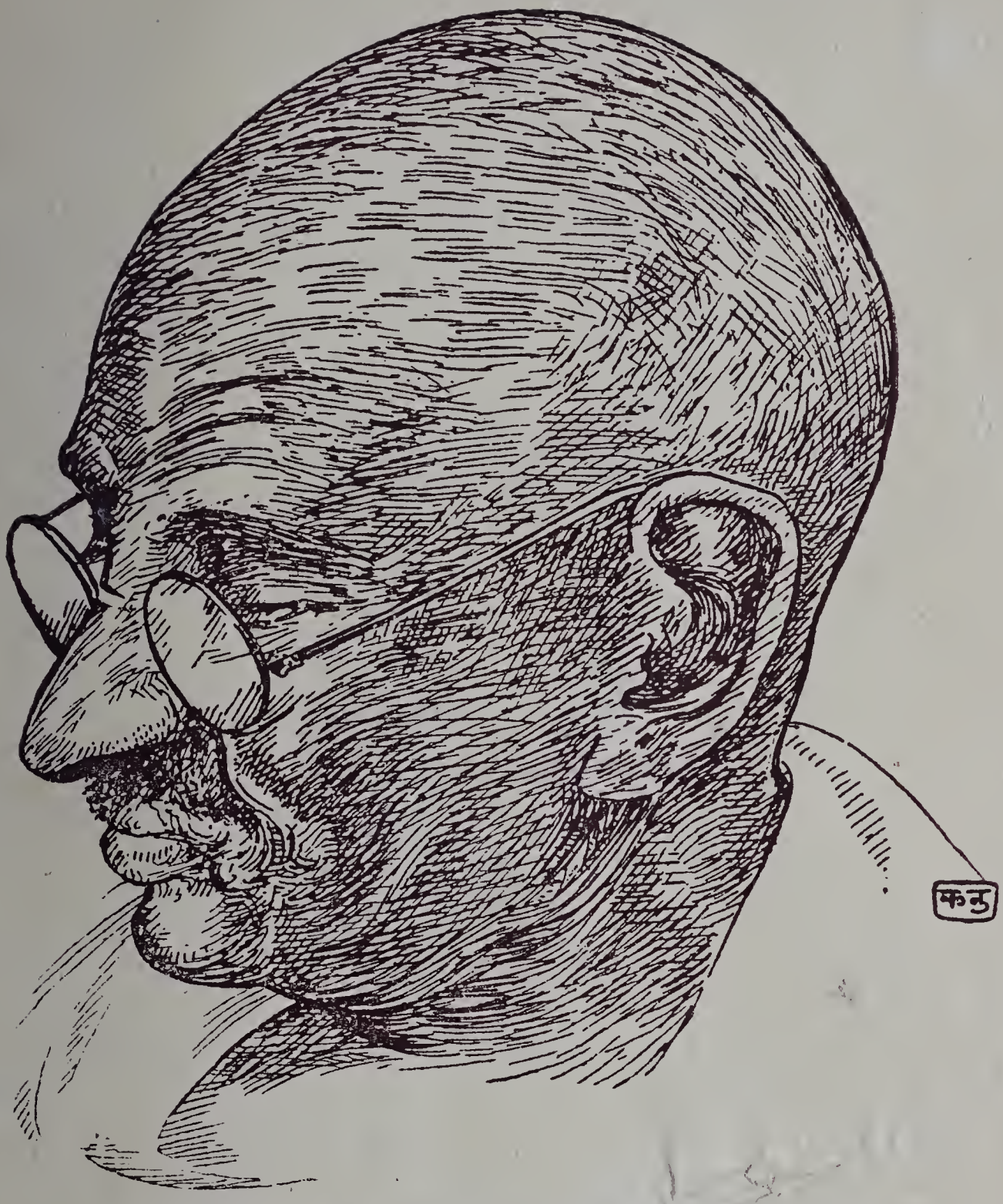

MY MEMORABLE MOMENTS WITH BAPU

By

MANUBEHN GANDHI

BY MAHATMA GANDHI

Compiled by R. K. Prabhu

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MY MEMORABLE MOMENTS WITH BAPU

By
MANUBEHN GANDHI

Foreword
By
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Translated from the original in Gujarati
By
ARVIND SHETH

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This is an English version of a book originally in Gujarati by Shri Manubehn Gandhi. The Gujarati book *Bapuna Jivan-prasango* published by M/S Vora and Company, Publishers Private Ltd., Bombay-2, was adjudged worthy of a prize by the Government of India under their Scheme for encouraging social education literature in our various national languages. The English version has the privilege of a Foreword by Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. We hope the book will be appreciated by readers as a welcome addition to Gandhian literature.

12-1-1960

FOREWORD

Much has been written about Gandhiji, and no doubt learned people will continue to write about this great man and the great deeds that he performed. He became the symbol of an age, representing in himself the past, the present and, to some extent, the future of India. Even those who were privileged to come in close contact with him could only understand some aspects of his many-sided nature, and marvel at this simple man of the people rising to levels which appeared to be beyond human reach. No one who saw him could forget him; no one who came in contact with him could fail to carry that impress all his life.

These little anecdotes collected by Manubehn Gandhi from her own experience of her grandfather have a peculiar value. They bring out in simple language simple deeds, simple gestures and simple approaches to the day-to-day problems of life, and yet they have a profound meaning as almost everything that Gandhiji did had a meaning. Grown-up people

can learn much from them; but more particularly they are meant for children who may, by these simple stories, get some glimpses of a person whom they have not seen but who is always with them in the very fabric of India which he fashioned.

I am glad this little book is coming out in translations thus enabling more people to read it.

New Delhi,
October 27, 1959

Jawaharlal Nehru

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1

BAPUJI'S CHAPPALS

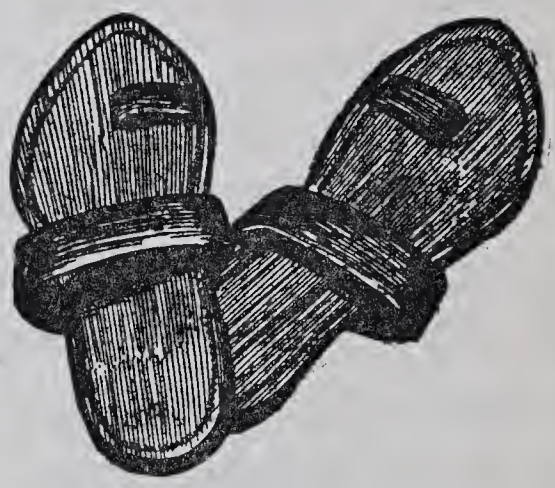
Once, while Gandhiji was a prisoner at the Agakhan Palace, his chappals (Indian style foot-wear) needed repairing. Due to oversight, it was not attended to the same day, and had, therefore, to be put off for the next day.

Meanwhile, on grounds of Bapuji's ill health, orders for our release were received, and, the next day, we were to leave for "Parnakooti", Poona. Since both Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadev Desai had passed away in the Agakhan Palace, two great offerings at the altar of freedom, and Bapu was released on medical grounds, people flocked in large numbers to have his Darshan.

Without informing Bapu, I ran down to the cobbler, to have his foot-wear mended, and on my return, I found him looking for his chappals as he needed them. I informed him that they were with the *mochi* and he asked me whether I had settled a small fee for the labour, or whether it was being done *ex gratia* in the name of the Mahatma. I told him

that the charges were fixed at eight annas. He said that as neither he nor I was earning a pie, we have nothing to pay. Who would then bear the cost? I was at a loss for a reply.

I then hastened down to get back the chappals unmended. The cobbler, who was a believer in omens, said that it was his first job for the day, and he refused to relinquish it. Therefore, I had, perforce, to tell him that they were Gandhiji's chappals. He was delighted to hear this, and immediately volunteered to do the work free of charge, as he believed that it was his good fortune to be of some small service to the Mahatma.



After careful consideration, I took the man to Bapuji and explained matters to him. Gandhiji was seated with some British visitors. He said to the cobbler, "It appears that you

are a believer in omens, and consider it a good luck to be of service to me. Why not accept me as your pupil and teach me the art of mending foot-wear? You will thus become my teacher." The man agreed, Bapu asked him to share his own seat and he thus commenced his first lesson in the trade of his teacher straightaway. However, he continued his conversation with the visitors without interruption. They were amazed at Bapu's behaviour and begged an explanation. The whole incident was related to them and Bapuji added, "I wanted to teach a lesson to this young girl who had undertaken the repairs of my chappals without consulting me first. Moreover, as this cobbler is seeking good luck, I have adopted him as my teacher. Becoming a Mahatma can be most enjoyable!"

This was indeed a picture of contrast—on one side was Gandhiji, clean and tidy, while on the other was the cobbler—his teacher—unwashed and illiterate. Within an hour, the teacher and the taught together finished the mending of the chappals and also the talks with the visitors came to an end.

That pair of chappals is still in my possession, and is one of my treasures, for it reminds me of an important lesson taught me by Bapu.

2

BAPUJI'S FOUNTAIN-PEN

Once, Gandhiji's fountain-pen was pilfered. It was a costly one. Though it was immediately replaced, he was much pained by the theft, and made up his mind not to use any article that was so attractive as to tempt someone to steal it.

He thenceforth started using a pen-holder and a nib. This nib once got bent, and it took me about ten minutes to fetch a new one. For him, every moment was precious, and the loss of a single minute could mean that his whole day's schedule would be upset.

On my return, I found him sharpening the other end of the holder and I inquired of its reason. He replied, "Now the point of my nib will never get curved. In olden days, people used such *kittas* for writing purposes. Their use rendered handwriting tidy, and they did not cost a pie. Today,

we spend quite a lot on writing tools, but they either get stolen or spoilt. From now on, I am going to use such a *kitta* and I shall need not to worry on any of these accounts." His first letter to be penned thus was addressed to Lord Mountbatten.

Even today I treasure this *kitta* as a memento of Gandhiji's appreciation of the true worth of both time and money.

We get the glimpses of the greatness of the Father of the Nation in such apparently small incidents.

3

WORSHIP OF DARIDRANARAYAN

In the winter of 1947, when we were campaigning on foot through Noakhali, vast crowds of people gathered to obtain Bapu's Darshan and to seek his advice on political, medical and other matters.

In a certain village, a girl of eight to ten years, was down with typhoid coupled with pneumonia. We heard that she had become extremely emaciated. When we reached the child's home, the women folk disappeared from view as they observed *purdah*. The poor girl

was thus left alone. She was kept in the outer part of the hut and her bed was made up of worn and torn pieces of cloth. I went inside to explain to those women that a great man was at their doors. Why miss his Darshan? But in their eyes he was their foe, and they had no regard whatsoever for him. On coming out, I found that Bapuji, without a thought for himself in the biting cold, had taken his own cotton *chudder* and woollen shawl and had spread it over the poor sick girl. He cleansed her nose with his handkerchief and washed her face. Though uncovered and chilled, yet he stood there fondly patting the girl.

The above is a fine example symbolizing the devotion of Daridranarayan's (the Lord of the poor) devotee! I was commissioned thrice in the afternoon to feed that girl with warm water and honey and to apply mud-packs on her head. By night time, her temperature had returned to normal. The people, who had earlier looked upon him as their enemy, now came to him with glad hearts to pay their respects. They said, he was the messenger of God, and further asked, "What can we do for you?" Bapuji replied, "I am neither an angel nor a prophet. To render service to

others is my life's mission and I am here to serve you. I am your true servant. I do not claim credit for the recovery of that girl. She was cleansed, and fed with nutritive food, and she has recovered. But, in case you are anxious to reward me, I ask of you to fear none, and not to cause fear to anyone. We are all the children of the Creator and are equally entitled to our existence. I entreat you to foster this spirit."

4

ADVICE TO A PUBLIC WORKER

I wore Gujarati dress when we first went to Noakhali. But Bapuji felt that it was not appropriate for the conditions there. So he asked the gentleman from the Marwari Society, who had come there to see him, to have a Punjabi outfit tailored for me. The gentleman got it made but declined to accept payment for it, only out of his devotion to the Mahatma. Moreover Bapu introduced me as his grand-daughter. But the Mahatmaji questioned his refusal thus: "How will you meet its cost? The money you handle belongs to the public and you cannot abuse

even a penny of it; not even for me. Moreover, the father of this girl is in a position to bear the expense of the outfit. A worker has to be careful about the money that he handles. Today you may exercise a little latitude for Manu, tomorrow you may be doing it for a relation of yours. I know you well and do not doubt your bonafides at all, but am offering you my affectionate advice for your future guidance."

5

THAT IS JAWAHARLAL!

Pandit Nehru was to come to Noakhali to hold consultations with Gandhiji. Arrangements for his stay were made in a hut. Bapuji himself dug a ditch with a spade and demonstrated how the privy should be constructed. Under his supervision, I carried out the work, but even so he was not satisfied, and wondered whether it would suit Jawaharlalji. He, therefore, asked me to take his commode to Panditji's hut.

The next day, Jawaharlalji and Mridulabehn accompanied us in our morning walk. Panditji, who could cross the bridge in two

long strides ouly, was much amused at the way in which Bapuji crossed the small bridge. On returning, Bapuji had instructed me to see carefully to Panditji's comfort and convenience during his stay with us. Under his orders I had removed his commode to Jawaharlalji's hut. Panditji was annoyed when he saw it, and said, "How can I use Bapuji's commode and thus inconvenience him? Can you not realize this? I am neither delicate nor old." I replied, "I brought

it under orders from Bapuji." With great sternness he then said, "It is your responsibility to look after him, and it is also your duty to decide about his special needs. He is thoughtful of the comforts of others even at the cost of inconvenience to himself. I repeat that I am a young man and can manage with the ordinary latrine arrangements. You should not obey such orders even at the risk of incurring his displeasure." With this, the sternness on his face gave way to humour. He embraced me and said, "You can return and tell Bapu that Jawaharlal forbade you." He then made detailed enquiries about Bapuji's health and food.

Panditji's devotion to Bapuji was complete, as the above illustration shows. Even after I left him, his advice — forceful and humorous—continued to ring in my ears. I reported the incident to Bapuji at the time of his massage and he remarked, "That is Jawaharlal; so let it be." Such was their mutual affection and understanding.

6

DEDICATED TO THE DOWNTRODDEN

Once in Noakhali, on account of the severe cold I brought him hot water with which to wash his feet. He was pained, and said, "I can understand your using hot water for a bath, but how dare you use it for washing the legs when such abnormal conditions exist here? Do you not realize that a number of women fail to get enough fuel even to bake their daily bread? On what grounds can we then wantonly use hot water for washing our feet?" He finally washed his feet with cold water.

This pen picture gives us some idea of the sort of man Gandhiji was. "The Father of the Nation" as he was so aptly called was dedicated, heart and soul, to the cause of the poor and the downtrodden.

7

SKILFUL TAILOR

I had a piece of Pashmina (fine woollen cloth). When it was cold, Bapuji used it as a covering for his head. Once, on returning from prayers I gave him a new woollen piece, as the old one was worn out. But

Bapuji did not accept it. He said, "Neither you nor I earn a pie, though you have your earning father to bear your expenses, but I have no one. How then can I afford to discard that shawl? I must mend it." So saying, he started sewing. It was almost midnight when I volunteered to finish the rest of it in order to let him go to bed. But he insisted upon completing the work, and asked me to judge the quality of his sewing. Every stitch was perfect; so skilful was his work with the needle that I could not resist comparing it to the work of a competent tailor or housewife.

A great man like him could have, on asking, hundreds of beautiful woollen shawls, but he used the same patched up shawl throughout our pilgrimage. He had asked

me teasingly, "Am I not clever at sewing?" I said to myself that not only could he stitch cloth but also he had stitched together the various parts of India and had brought harmony in various situations where discord had been the key-note.

I still have that precious shawl which I have preserved with the greatest care.

8
BAPUJI AND RAJAJI

After passing through the severest tests in Noakhali, it was Gandhiji's first visit to Delhi for consultations with the new Viceroy on the issue of Independence for India. While in Delhi he had a very heavy schedule. Once, he was on the point of having his shave in his bath-tub when Rajaji turned up. So Bapuji instructed me to place a chair beside the bath-tub and asked me to go ahead with his shave, while he talked to Rajaji. I said, "I feel shy." Bapuji said to Rajaji, "Manu is feeling shy to shave me in your presence." Rajaji then joked with me as follows: "How foolish you are ! This is such an art that you will never be left without a livelihood. Once you

master it, and whenever you are unemployed, you could start a saloon advertising that it has been certified by Mahatma Gandhi!" And they both burst out laughing. Finally, I did shave him while he talked to Rajaji. From then onwards, till the end of his life, it was my job to shave him. If there were no visitors, when I was attending to this part of his toilet, he would sleep soundly for a few minutes as he lay in the bath-tub. He would wake up fresh as a daisy and ready to cope with both, problems and work. Bapuji exercised admirable control over his senses!

Whenever he was questioned about his activities by foreign visitors, he would introduce me and say, "This girl shaves me. Can you believe it?" Once, when Lady Mountbatten visited him at the Harijan Colony he told her, "This girl shaves me without applying soap, and I fall fast asleep during the process." The visitor laughed heartily at this, but I remarked, "In our country it is customary to brand those as barbers who are totally inefficient." He pointed out, "How difficult it is to receive appreciation gracefully nowadays!" At this little dig, we could not help but laugh.

9

SEVERE TEST

At Patna, we were guests of Dr. Syed Mohmed. On the occasion of his son's marriage, the bridegroom came to obtain the blessings of Bapuji, who had commenced the *yajna* of Hindu-Muslim unity. As a sister, I placed the *tilak* on his forehead, and wished him all the best in life. He reciprocated with a gift of a complete set of gold ornaments weighing about 30 tolas. I hesitated to accept it and looked to Bapuji for guidance. He said in all seriousness, "It is a gift from a brother. You should accept it."

I did so, but within ten minutes I said to Bapu, "I wish to donate it to the Muslim Relief Fund and I request you to auction it." Bapuji said, "This is your test and I am glad that you have come out successfully."

Thus, it was impossible to know when he would try us; to work for him was as difficult as handling the sharp edge of a razor.

10

COURTESY IN SPEECH

Once, I casually remarked, "In reply to your courteous letters to Suhrawardy, just see what he has written! It appears he is beyond improvement." While making this remark, I had used the singular when referring to Suhrawardysaheb.

Bapu gave a reply which still rings in my ears.

He said, "How dare you address him in the singular? He is older than you, and is moreover the Chief Minister of a big province. You ought to suffix either '*bhai*' or '*saheb*' to his name. Discourtesy in speech is one of the forms of *himsa*. We have failed to copy some of the good habits of the Britisher who, in giving orders even to his humblest subordinate will invariably use the word 'Please' and will never miss saying 'Thank you' when the work is done. As long as our children are not taught at home and at school courtesy in both, speech and manners, our nation will not be able to progress. In my opinion, the Independence of India embraces

moral, economic, social and religious development of the nation."

Thus, even in casual conversation, did Bapu manage to impart lessons of great meaning and depth!

11

VICTORY OF LOVE

In 1947, we were on a visit to Kashmir. From Delhi, we were to proceed to Srinagar via Rawalpindi. At the Amritsar Station, a crowd of more than 200 youths greeted us with black flags shouting, "Gandhi, go back". Their shouts deafened our ears. Bapuji shut his eyes and plugged his ears to the sounds of this unfriendly demonstration, and we too ignored it. As the train was due to leave the station, the crowd, finding their plans to create mischief frustrated, dispersed. We returned from Kashmir after a stay of four days. The same batch of young men, who had come previously with mischievous intent, had now collected a fairly large sum of money at the station itself for the Harijan Fund. They apologized to Bapuji saying, "We did not understand you at first, but your short tour of four days in this part of our country has

brought about a change in our hearts. So, please forgive us."

That the very same batch of young men, who only four days previously had greeted us with black flags, should now collect money for Bapu's Harijan Fund, and lay it at his feet with profuse apologies was an unique example of the victory of love over hatred. Had Bapuji shown the slightest annoyance, or the Police jailed them, the result would have been the opposite. This incident I cherish in my memory even now.

Bapuji told everyone to let bygones be bygones.

12

CONSIDERATE FOR OTHERS

It so happened that it was raining and water entered our compartment due to leakage. The guard requested Bapuji to shift to another bogie. Thereupon Bapuji told the guard that if other passengers were to be shifted to the compartment vacated by him and thus put to discomfort, it was as well that he continued to occupy it. To this, the guard had no reply, but he solicitously inquired if he could be of any service to him. Bapuji replied, that there was plenty of good work that he could do, the principal

being not to harass people or accept bribes from them. If he succeeded in doing so, he would consider it worthy service—rendered to him personally.

13
SARI AND BANGLES

In December 1947, I once wore a sari with a glass bangle on each hand. Bapuji did not comment about the sari, but he did ask me to replace the bangles with self-spun cotton strands. I said, "I quite appreciate your point of view that these bangles are a symbol of the slavery of womanhood. But I do feel that the dress is incomplete if no bangles are worn with the sari. You would say, in reply, that the ladies of the Ashram do not think so. But I make bold to say that they follow your suggestions only to please you. Whenever I accept your advice, you appear pleased, and for the same reason these other girls too accept it. But, given the opportunity, they over-indulge themselves as a reaction to their former suppression. And this does tell upon you, your work, your near ones and the country at large.

You have taught me to be natural and unadorned. I do not want to make a secret of the fact that I have worn these things today with a purpose. I admire simplicity which is the result of inner conviction, but to practise simplicity that one neither understands nor appreciates, and to agree to all restrictions simply to please you is nothing but hypocrisy. You yourself and some of your colleagues who are in the habit of giving unasked for advice, are more in the wrong than we are. We must be able to judge ourselves, our weakness and our strength. Following your advice within limitations, we shall rise to the responsibilities imposed on us, and thus be a help to you. In this way, your work will be bettered, wielding its influence everywhere. Today, you are inclined to be pessimistic, and you feel that everyone has let you down. The reason for it is this. Have a look at those who have been your associates for the past 25 years. Today, they themselves, their culture, their society, and even you are being vilified. I hear reports to this effect from outside and am dumbfounded. Nobody dares tell you about such things."

He was all attention while I talked. For a long time, annoyance had been seething inside me, and I had decided to furnish Bapuji with details and proofs as to why I had decided to wear a sari instead of the Punjabi outfit. Finally he said, "I appreciate all that you have told me. I am equally pleased at your wearing the sari with bangles. You are quite correct. I have always tried to emphasize that a man should practise what his heart permits. But I do not want things to be done merely in order to please Gandhi." He was overjoyed and said, "Even if I had by my side only five girls who were bold enough to tell me things frankly, my mission would have been much easier. I am happy, I had you, at least." In the meantime, the Princess of Belgium turned up. Introducing me to her he said, "This girl has just delivered a long lecture to her grandfather." After meeting her, I immediately changed my dress to a Punjabi one. So he said, "I hope, you have not gone mad." I said that the other dress was worn to serve as a warning to him. Bapuji narrated the whole incident to the Princess, who enjoyed it. Bapuji remarked, "The sari worn

by this girl today has given me much to think about."

14

HUMILITY OF BAPU

At the time of integration of the States of Kathiawar, the Maharaja Saheb of Bhavnagar expressed a desire to call upon Gandhiji. I fixed up an appointment for him after prayers. Bapuji had already told me that I was to receive the Maharaja Saheb on his arrival, and that I should meet his car as it rolled up. Immediately after the prayers, he again reminded me of this. After serving Bapu the warm water mixed with honey that he used to take after prayers, I awaited the Maharaja Saheb, who arrived in time. The door to Bapuji's room was kept closed because of the cold weather. I opened the door for the Maharaja Saheb, who, on entering the room, greeted the Mahatmaji. Bapuji stood up, reciprocated the greetings, and sat down once again. He wanted to have confidential deliberations with the Maharaja, and so Shri A. P. Pattani and I left the room. Within ten minutes, the visitor came

out having offered to Bapuji everything that was his. I wondered why Bapuji had stood up to greet this ruler who was not as important a personage as many others who had visited him in Delhi. I, therefore, asked Bapuji why he had stood up on the arrival of the Bhavnagar ruler. He said, "I was a student of Samaldas College, Bhavnagar, and as such he is my ruler."

This is a good example of the humility of the man who put an end to monarchy in India!

15

A LEAF FROM THE CALENDAR

In the Agakhan Palace, it was the job of Mirabehn to take out the used leaf from the calendar every day. Once, when she was sick, I noticed that nobody had removed the leaf, and so I removed it. The blank reverse of such leaves was used by Bapu to write upon; especially on those days when he observed silence. It was the custom, therefore, to preserve such leaves carefully in the form of a pad. Unaware of this thrifty habit, I threw away the leaf after tearing it off. Bapuji

looked for it in the pad but failed to find it. Right from Kasturba downwards, everyone was questioned as to who had removed that day's leaf. I said, "I have removed and thrown it away", with a feeling that my act will certainly be appreciated. But to my surprise, Gandhiji ordered that the leaf should be searched out. All of us in the Aga-khan Palace, along with those who came there from the Yeravda Jail to water the gardens, set out to search for the missing leaf. It was finally traced twisted up into a ball near the Samadhi of Mahadevbhai Desai. Bapuji rejoiced at the finding of this small scrap of paper as if he had recovered a lost 100 rupee note! Of course, for a poor country like ours, this leaf was no less valuable!

He then pressed that leaf in a book and was greatly relieved when he could put it to use. Even today this leaf is one of my precious possessions.

16

THRIFTY BAPU

In Patna, on account of the excessive heat Mahatmaji was in the habit of covering his head with a wet towel, and the water from

an earthen pot was used for the purpose. We were staying at Dr. Syed Mohmed's home. He said, "Bapuji has increased the number of your jobs. Why don't you get ice for a rupee every day and use it?" The suggestion was made in Bapuji's presence. He laughingly remarked, "You are a man with an income. Your sons also are earning members. But neither this girl nor I are in such a fortunate position. So, how can she afford ice? It is not even necessary, for our manner of living is simple. This wet towel serves the purpose, and it is quite harmless too. We might catch cold by attempting to reduce the bodily heat abruptly using ice."

17

NEGLECT NOTHING

Once, while lifting a table, someone dropped both the bottle and the plate lying on it and broke them. I placed an order for another bottle. Bapuji said with some sarcasm, "Yes, there is no dearth of bottles! You feel as if you are a multi-millionaire. I regret asking others to do my work if you people are so careless. Besides, I am becoming careless, and a parasite as well. We

should not tolerate the breakage of the smallest article—much less a bottle—because of negligence. There would have been no loss had the bottle and the plate been removed prior to the lifting of the table."

18

BAPUJI AND MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD

In Delhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was almost a daily visitor to Gandhiji. At the time of his visit, I invariably placed by his side an empty plate to serve as an ash-tray. On one occasion, I forgot to do so. Bapuji was holding deliberations with Maulana Saheb on important issues regarding India and Pakistan. He rose in the middle of the talks, and Maulana Saheb could not make out the reason for his so doing. Bapuji walked to the window opposite, picked up the plate lying there and placed it at its usual place by the side of Maulana Saheb who blushed with embarrassment. I also felt guilty at this omission of mine, but Bapuji remarked jocularly, "How could I afford to miss such an opportunity of rendering you a slight service?"

19

MAHATMAJI AND MANGO JUICE

Once, in the month of May, while in Delhi, Gandhiji was staying at the Harijan Colony. The mango had just come into season, and we had been sent a basket of the delicious fruit. I took him a glassful of its juice. Bapu then asked me about its cost. Ignoring this as a joke, I engaged myself in copying out his notes, letters and memoranda. After a while, I again went to him and told him to drink the juice. He said, "I thought you would return only after you had found out the price of the fruit. As a matter of fact, it was imperative that you ascertained its price before giving it to me. Not only you have failed to do this, but also you have not brought me a reply to my inquiry. As I have heard, each mango at present costs ten annas, and thus the price of this glassful of juice comes to two and a half rupees! I can, therefore, very well do without it. But you had the temerity to serve me a full glass of such costly juice in these days when our people are faced with high prices, starvation

and hardships. Can you not realize that this juice, instead of providing me with nourishment, causes me considerable anguish?"

He was much perturbed when telling me this. In the meantime, there came two refugee women with their children to pay their respects to him. Without losing any time, Bapuji passed on the juice to those kids in separate glasses and remarked, "This is a decisive demonstration of the fact that God is always my Saviour. I was acutely pained in my heart and was wondering what was to become of me. It was disconcerting to find that even this girl, who has been closely associated with me for many years,

should be tempted to serve me such expensive juice. But the Saviour sent these kids in time. I am all the more grateful to Him that they are such ones as I wished would come. Just see, how merciful is my Lord!"

I stood there, very unhappy that Bapu should suffer such mental torture.

20
CHUMS OF CHILDHOOD

The evening prayer bells were tolling when a Mer (a tribe of Saurashtra) family hailing from Porbandar came to me. It consisted of the father, aged 80, his son, and his son's wife. From their dress, I placed them as Kathiawaris, and with some curiosity, I inquired of them in Gujarati, "Where do you come from?" The lady replied, "He is my father-in-law, and while on pilgrimage to Gokul and Mathura, he gathered that Mahatma Gandhiji is none else but Mohan the playmate of his boyhood and the son of the Dewan of Porbandar. On enquiry, he was told that the Mahatma was in Delhi, and we have, therefore, come to seek his Darshan." At the mention of my home town, Porbandar, my curiosity was further augmented

and without disclosing that I too belonged to the same town as they did, I started talking to the old man, "Sir, where do you stay?" He replied, "Far far away in the town of Porbandar. I came to know that Mohan, the chum of my childhood, has become a great Mahatma and has also secured freedom for our country. I am quite aged now and am afraid that he may not recognize me. But I thought of seeking his Darshan since I am here. It will help me on my pilgrimage to Gokul and Mathura. Mohan's father also was a very powerful man." I told the old man, "Sir, you remain seated here. You can receive Bapuji's Darshan while he passes this way. Within five minutes, on seeing Bapuji approaching us, I informed the Mer that this his playmate Mohan was coming. I walked down to Bapuji and before we returned to our room in the Harijan Colony, I had told him all about the aged Mer who had come to seek his Darshan. Mer said, "Mohanbhai, please permit me to fall at your feet." And so saying he knelt down before the Mahatma. It was a touching scene, recapturing the highlights of an old friendship. Bapuji, because he had been informed in

advance about this man, made him rise, and then burst into joyous laughter. Rajendra-babu, who was also there, stood wonder-struck. We all were enchanted at the love that showed in his addressing Bapuji in the singular. The old man was pleased to see that just as he had not forgotten Mohan, so also the Mahatmaji had not forgotten him and had treated him with great friendliness. The Mer said to Bapuji, "You have now become a great personage. I was afraid that you would not recognize me. I am so glad that you have not forgotten me." The Mer then recalled many of their boyhood games and pranks, and referred to Mahatmaji's parents. Bapuji was much interested in all the old man had to say; more so because they revived memories of his parents, and the good old times spent at Porbandar. The Mer then inquired of his friend's wife saying that he desired to offer her his respects. For a moment, Bapuji was not sure about whom the Mer was talking. Then, he remembered that he was referring to Kasturba Gandhi. He said, "She has left for her heavenly home. But it is solely due to her that I was able to become a Mahatma." Bapuji attempted to say these sentences in Mer's

colloquial dialect but was not entirely successful, and we had a hearty laugh at his expense. Bapuji then inquired of his family, and as he had no more time at his disposal, he entrusted them to my care introducing me as the grand-daughter of Amritlal Gandhi, who was known to the Mer. It was left to me to fill in those details which had been omitted. The old man asked about grand-father and father, and was glad to hear such news as I could give him. He said that from my Punjabi dress (*salwar* and *kamiz*) he had failed to place me as a Kathiawari, and he also mentioned that he did not like my dress. I heard him out patiently, for it was no use arguing about a trifling matter like this. I asked them to join us at dinner, but he refused. He told his daughter-in-law to take off her gold ear-rings, and said, with emphasis, that it was an unparalleled opportunity to offer them to the Mahatmaji. He then continued, "I shall get her another pair as soon as we return to our native place." As Bapuji was having his massage, the old man handed over the ear-rings to me. He cherished so great a devotion for Bapuji that before leaving, he knelt down before the seat which Gandhiji was in the habit of using.

I stood there marvelling at the fine bonds of friendship!

21
BAPUJI'S BIRTHDAY

Once on the occasion of Gandhiji's Birthday, the Gujaratis of Delhi had collected a purse for the refugee fund, and they obtained his consent to attend their meeting at 3 o'clock. At this time, Bapuji was suffering from cold and flu. When Sardar Patel heard about the Mahatmaji's decision, he remarked, "Why did you consent to attend the meeting when you are so unwell! You are so greedy for money that you even leave your death-bed to collect a purse. Why worry about fund now? Why go there sick and coughing? But, of course you will not listen to me."

Addressing about a hundred Gujaratis who attended the meeting, Bapuji said, "Nandlalji informed me that you Gujarati wanted to meet me. He also gave me to understand that you would present me with a purse. I fell for the offer as I am a greedy man! But I did not think that I would be called upon to address you in return for some money!

"As long as I was in South Africa, I had not thought much of my birthday, but here in India, because of my spinning wheel, this day has come to be known as '*Rentia Barash*'. (*Rentia* — Spinning wheel, and *Barash* — the 12th day of the month of the Hindu calendar. Gandhiji was born on the 12th day of *Bhadra Vadi*.) The spinning wheel is the symbol of Ahimsa. To-day, the meaning of this symbol appears to have been lost. Even Ahimsa is seldom practised. I therefore wonder why this day should be celebrated. But it is quite human to try to obtain what we want. So, I agreed to the celebration of my birthday. I do hope that Gujaratis, wherever they may be, will work for the cause of Ahimsa. But I am doubtful if they would also spin. After much work, Khadi has finally been adopted by Gujarat. I wish that no foreign cloth should be used in Gujarat, — not even Indian mill-made cloth! I cannot now tell you in detail about this, but I shall be satisfied if you Gujaratis, wherever you are, will spin only.

"Under the garb of religion a number of wrongs are being committed. It is so tragic. We are free from slavery and are now

independent. But liberty is being abused to the point of wantonness.

"I am told here that Hindi is being taught to these Gujarati children. Gujaratis gave a warm welcome to the introduction of Hindi, and are taking examinations in it too. Hindi means Hindustani; a language which can easily be understood both by Sanskrit-speaking and Urdu-speaking people. Punjabis will generally use Urdu, and non-Urdu speaking people will use Sanskrit. So, I showed our people the golden mean, and that is Hindustani. Let us learn both the scripts. The millions in the villages will not be able to understand either pure Sanskrit or pure Arabic. I took this fact into consideration when suggesting that Hindi should be made our national language.

"I am grateful to you for the purse. Blankets are badly needed for the refugees. It is we who have to provide for these things. The Government cannot be expected to supply everything that is needed. We can render its work easier by lending a helping hand."

Some of those who had gathered there requested Sardar Patel also to say a few words. He said, "It is unfair to present the purse to the Mahatma and ask me to say a few words.

Bapu is a Bania, and is therefore greedy for money. In spite of such a bad cough, he is here to deprive you of money (*Loud laughter*). But I must entreat you to let him rest."

This meeting was held on the prayer grounds.

22

APPRECIATION OF GIFTS

Shankerraoji had presented Bapu with dhoties made from self-spun yarn, as a sign of his devotion. But I gave them to the Dhobi without anybody's knowledge. On finding Bapuji looking for something, I inquired as to what he wanted. He demanded, "Where are those dhoties given by Shankerraoji?" I replied that I had given them to be washed. He was annoyed. He said that the life of cloth is much reduced when washed by a Dhobi. "Although you are to blame for this, I excuse you because you are busy attending to Mira. But such behaviour reflects laziness. Would I look more handsome by wearing them whiter? We ought to use gifts in such a manner as to please the giver, and in not being able to do so, I find fault with myself. I should have instructed you, that nobody was to touch those dhoties."

23

CODE LANGUAGE

Once, Gandhiji had commissioned Suhrawardysaheb to convey his message to Jinnahsaheb at Karachi. On his return, Bapu asked him, "Lion or Jackal?" Suhrawardysaheb replied, "I am here as a mouse for I know that it is a very discreet animal." Bapuji said, "You are a man of understanding," and began telling a tale though he was running a temperature of 102°. "A lion once caught a mouse in his net and thought of eating him in the course of time. But, in the meanwhile, the mouse cut the net with its teeth and ran away. Even in the house, one cannot say when the mouse will bite. You are such a mouse!" What satire! A mouse is indeed treacherous.

Suhrawardysaheb said, "Sir, I am helpless now that you have understood the point."

Such was the code language used by politicians.

24

BAPUJI, THE BANIA

Once in 1947, while returning from prayers, Gandhiji was approached by a Tamil gentleman for his autograph in Tamil characters. Bapuji said to him, "I will try to do as you want. You correct me if necessary. But it will cost you Rs. 10/-; double the usual charge of Rs. 5/-." To this, the gentleman agreed. Slowly recalling to his mind the characters in Tamil, he penned his initials "M. K. Gandhi" correctly in that script. The gentleman protested, "But you gave me to understand that you do not know Tamil well."

Bapuji replied, "I deserve an additional Rs. 10/- if I have been able to write quite correctly."

The visitor had no extra money. So Bapuji told him, "I am to be here till to-morrow evening, up to which time you can pay off the balance. I fully trust you." This inspired greater esteem for Bapuji in the heart of that gentleman. He bowed to Bapuji, and offered him his golden ring. Bapuji was gratified at this. In the meantime, Panditji arrived and inquired of the people standing by, "What is the matter?"

To which I replied, "Bapuji is selling his merchandise." Gandhiji narrated the whole incident and asked, "Am I not entitled to my remuneration towards the Harijan Fund by signing correctly in Tamil?"

Panditji said to the Tamil gentleman, "Are you not aware that Bapuji is a Bania?"

The Tamil gentleman replied: "But he is *par excellence* even at robbing."

Gandhiji said, "But think of the blessings that you will receive from the people for whose cause this amount is to be spent." Then, the Tamil gentleman expressed his feelings to Gandhiji, saying, "Your blessings alone are enough for me", and, he knelt down before the Mahatma who patted him fondly on the back. Then he left us greatly pleased.

25

MAN, HIS ERRORS AND SINS

Of the varied people accompanying Gandhiji during his walks, a certain gentleman once expressed a desire to confess his sins to Bapuji. Bapuji told him, "The true expiation of a sin lies in the firm determination not to commit such a misdeed again. Let every man carry

out a daily introspection of his doings, and make a clean breast of any wrong he has committed. To err is human and no man is infallible. But to conceal the error is sinful because falsehood has to be fabricated for that purpose. This, in its turn, gives birth to the deliberate commission of another thousand and one misdeeds, which cause considerable harm. In the case of a boil on the body, the poison therefrom has to be removed right from the root or else it may circulate in the whole body and the man may finally die. The same is true of all errors and our failure to confess them. God does not fail to forgive even those who atone for their sins during the last moments of their life. We must have at heart the welfare of all living beings that exist on the earth, however small or large. To foster this spirit we must daily offer our prayers to the Almighty both in the morning and in the evening. The wishes for the well-being of all also embrace our own welfare."

26

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RYOTS

Laying down a code of conduct for the peasants in India, Gandhiji had said, "In our country now we have a National Government. Politically also, we shall soon be fully independent. We have been striving to abolish zamindari for many years. With the advent of our freedom, we shall make great strides in that direction. But this does not mean that the ryots can employ pressure tactics against the zamindars. The latest report says that they have also resorted to violence. Such measures will not ameliorate their condition. For any injustice to you, you are privileged to knock the doors of the Government even at the dead of night. But you cannot take the law into your own hands. Liberty is no licence to misbehave. On the contrary, we have to be more courteous and disciplined. Only then we can win over the zamindars, and create in their minds a feeling of sympathy which will make them part with a portion of their holdings, necessary for the maintenance of the peasants on their estates. And thus we

can pave the way for happiness in our country. In short, a little tact, goodwill and the spirit of compromise will get for us what cannot be achieved by legislation. And the zamindars too will begin to realize that idle luxuries at the cost of their poor ryots will have to cease."

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